Timeless Textiles

A personal choice by Ella McLeod of textiles past and present

The James Hockey Gallery
West Surrey College of Art and Design
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23 September – 18 October 1986. Monday – Friday 10-6, Saturday 10-4

This is a personal choice by someone who is fascinated by the starkness of cloth made for utility, concentrated by limited local raw materials and local tools; the exuberance of decoration that arises as a counterpoise to a hard, bleak life; work by those modern craftsmen who, free from these restrictions, discover their own discipline within which to explore.

TIMELESS TEXTILES
From many periods and peoples
chosen by Ella McLeod

The James Hockey Gallery WSCAD
23 September - 18 October 1986

Ella McLeod was the founder and Head of the Department of Textil at this college from 1949 to 1974.

'I think that textiles are shaped by four roots:
- the available raw materials
- the available tools, dyes and skills
- the individual maker
- and, in the past, the needs of the family or of the community' Ella McLeod

The textiles in the exhibition are:

- loans by individuals, to whom we are very grateful and whose names are listed at the end of the catalogue

- kind loans from the permanent collections of the Crafts Study Centre, Bath and the Crafts Council, London

- items from the study collection of the Textiles Department at West Surrey College of Art and Design which was begun by Ella McLeod, has been added to over the years and was greatly enriched in 1986 by a bequest from Muriel Rose

The layout of the exhibition is:

- introduction area

- first main area: traditional textiles from all over the world illustrating 'the starkness of cloth made for utility..., the exuberance of decoration that arises as a counterpoise to a hard, bleak life'

- second main area: European textiles of the twentieth century, some anonymous industrial production, the majority of pieces from named workshops

- at the far end of the gallery in front of the windows there is a table on which there are textiles which visitors are encouraged to handle and feel; this should help to emphasise the tactile element of all textiles.

ENTRANCE - Inside gallery

1. Small tapestry
Silk
Probably S.E. Europe
WSCAD Collection Muriel Rose bequest

2. Sari
Silk and metal thread
India
19th century or early 20th

3. Red shawl
Cashmere goat fleece, hand spun and woven. Probably cochineal dye
Kashmir
WSCAD Collection

4. Large red embroidery
Narrow weave linen embroidered in silk
This is a suzani, an exuberant unit used by the Uzbek people as a cover, wall hanging or the interior wall of a tent or house to separate the sleeping alcove from the living room. They were embroidered by the women of a bride's family as a dowry. The design was drawn on the cloth then different members of the family each embroidered a strip - hence the slight variations
Central Asis
19th century

5. Two transparent curtain lengths
Cotton organdie hand block printed in the workshop of Phyllis Barron and Dorothy Larcher
England
1930s
Crafts Study Centre, Bath

6. As above

7. White bed quilt
Linen, hand quilted
England
18th century

8. Dark blue and white sari
Cotton
Bought in Southern India in 1982

9. Skirt
Cotton, hand spun and woven, dyed in red then peaks of cloth bound to resist further dyeing in indigo. The cloth was then embroidered
India
Probably early 20th century

10. Blue and white large bed quilt
Cotton using old indigo and white resist printed calicos
U.S.A.
19th century
WSCAD Collection Muriel Rose bequest

FIRST MAIN AREA

11. Heavy wool hooded cloak
Greek hill farmer's portable coat and sleeping bag combined, used against the wind and rain of the mountains.
Goat's hair, woven then felted, trimmed with plaits of white mountain sheep's wool
Greece
1960s WSCAD.

12. Black quilt
Cotton. Layers of cloth stitched all over with the occasional motif done at the same time as the vertical and horizontal stitching so that the whole pattern was done as one goes along. Made by and for a group of nomadic snake charmers, probably using aniline dyes as the quilt has faded in the English sunlight. This shows it was originally used in a dark interior.
Northern India
c. 1920

English, Welsh and French blankets and sheets from the time when farmers had their own sheeps wool or flax spun and woven for their own use, either at home or by the local weaver or small mill. Notice how different each is and not standardised. They were woven on narrow looms so have a centre seam. The finest sheet was handspun in Farnham in 1796. Other blankets and sheets may be handled in the far bay.

13. Two Welsh blankets
19th century

14. As above

15. Traditional English blanket

16. Linen sheet

17. Linen sheet

18. Linen sheet

Three bags with handles that won't come off:

19. Strips of bark twined by hand
Zimbabwe
1970s

20. Twined wool
South America

21. Knotted linen WSCAD.

22. Lengths of heavy hemp and linen
Russia and S.E. Europe
Early 20th century up to second world war

23. As above

24. As above

25. Household linen
France
19th century or early 20th

26. Bag
Linen embroidered in linen. Balkans.

27. Shirt
Linen, handspun
Made from the farmer's own fibre, spun probably by his women folk and sent to a local weaver or woven by an itinerant weaver who would come round the farms.
France
20th century up to second world war

28. Collars
Shaped for a person, one is seamless, the other takes a natural curve
Cotton
England
19th or early 20th century

29. Stockings
Cotton and silk, made on a stocking frame
England
19th or early 20th century

30. Two corn sacks
One unused, the other treasured and mended - not a throw-away. France. Probably early twentieth century.

A collection of items locally made for touch usage. Note the strength and the way the decoration is part of the structure, not added later:

31. Sling
Wool
Tibet
Probably 20th century

32. Camel girth
Goats wool

33. Mittens
'Naalbinding' technique
Norway

34. Knitted Guernsey
Natural undyed wool
Hand knitted on four or more needles. No seams - the sides are indicated by a purl stitch at each alternate row. Traditional 'pique' cast on edge of waist and sleeves. The wool to join has been spliced carefully - and it is very difficult to join. Note there is no 'wrong side' to the garment.
Ordered from and made by De CARTERET AND LE PATUREL
St Peter Port, Guernsey
1948 - 50

35. Camel's neck decoration
Goats wool, split ply technique
Bobbles are probably to keep away the flies
India
20th century

flour which is a staple ingredient of the local diet. The cloth has then been dyed in locally grown and procesed indigo. Cheaper versions of such cloths are patterned by pushing the paste through a metal stencil cut by men but the slow hand drawn decoration (by women) is more prized, giving as it does a repeated pattern but free drawing
Nigeria
20th century
WSCAD collection

51. Two flowing garments with wide sleeves
Expensive chieftain's robes, spindle spun cotton woven by men in very narrow strips which are then sewn together to make the cloth. The white robe has narrower strips and is unfinished as a garment - the neck has not been cut or the decoration embroidered. The embroidery would be done by a professional embroiderer. Note the blue garment's enormous pocket and the way that the embroidery solidly covers the ground creating a fine blue design where the cloth is left to show
Nigeria
1960s WSCAD.

52. Elaborately decorated red cloth
Marriage shawl. Hand spun cotton woven on narrow width loom. The design of spots is produced by binding peaks of cloth before dyeing. This is followed by the embroidery which includes mirrors to produce a rich encrusted garment.
Northern India
20th century

53. Sari
Silk and real gold thread. The gold and a very fine black silk thread are wound round a central pink core visible where there is wear. Handwoven.
19th century or early 20th
WSCAD collection

54. Sari
Cotton. Machine production. Bought in Manchester in the mid 1970s for £4.00

55. Sari
Silk and cotton, handwoven and hand embroidered in Bengal. The check woven to take the decoration.
India
Early 20th century

56. Shawl
Cashmere goat fleece. Handwoven in Kashmir for the European market
India
Mid 19th century

57. Red quilt
Cotton, old saris joined together and stitched all over to make decoration
Northern India
Probably early 20th century

58. Small red dress
Cotton richly embroidered with mirrors and pearls. The wedding garment of a child bride
Northern India
Probably early 20th century

Welsh skirts and shawl:

59. Red length for skirt

60. Three underskirts

Local wool except for the black and white skirt with the white stripe, which is cotton. All locally produced either handspun and woven at home or at a small local mill. Note the braid binding. Worn with the weft vertical. The length is adjusted through the tucks.
Wales
19th century

61. Shawl for outer wear in pony cart to go to market
Wool, industrial production
Wales or England for the Welsh market
19th century

Greek garments:

62. Pleated sleeveless garment
Very heavy wool cloth, heavily felted and cut and seamed in gores so that the skirt swirls out during a dance
WSCAD Collection

63. Similar weight garment

64. White cotton tunic
Braided and embroidered to be worn under the sleeveless coat

65. Leggings and socks
Harsh wool, hand spun and hand twisted yarn for long wear.
Knitted
WSCAD Collection

66. Waistcoat
Note corded decoration making subtle changes of black.

Nos 62 to 66 are all Greek tradtional garments, though not from the same areas. All are for festive occasions in contrast to the cloak?tent No 11.
19th or early 20th century WSCAD.

Long table in centre of gallery:
THis table shows some of the most delicate textiles ever produced. All depend on the rare finest quality of fibre - whether wool, flax, cotton or silk - which has always been in short supply, an occasional rarity found amongst the good quality and picked out as a treasure to be sought by the most highly skilled spinners, weavers, knitters or lacemakers or in the 18th and 19th centuries, by mills renowned for finest quality work.

Nowadays mills don't or can't process small exceptional qualit so these are no longer sought and grown.

67. Three 'lace' Shetland shawls
Handspun and hand knitted
Each lace Shetland shawl is from quarter of an ounce the finest fleece from under the chin on perhaps six finest-wool sheep in a Shetland flock.
These were made c 1960 but the skill is dying out WSC

68. Two stoles
Silk chiffon, machine woven
England or France
Probably 19th Century

69. Three kerchiefs with printed decoration
Linen, very fine hand block printed with alum mordant for the red and iron mordant for the purple, then dyed in madder dye. Note how the iron mordant has rotted the cloth
England
18th century

70. Piece of fine cotton muslin

71. Towel
Linen, embroidered. Note the attention to the details of the fringe
Greek
19th or early 20th century

72. Three hand towels
Linen hand spun and hand woven on very simple looms wit hand inlay of thicker threads to make the woven patter in the centre. Embroidered embellishment on the border These were used when greeting honoured guests. 'Imagine after a long dusty journay being offered a silver bowl full of cold water and these to dry your hands on'.
Turkish Empire
Late 19th or early 20th century

73. Fine linen handkerchief

74. Two lace-edged handkerchiefs

75. Fine plain linen handkerchief

76. Fine linen neck kerchief

77. Four baby caps
All linen except for a cotton edging on the largest cap

78. Shawl
Cashmere goat fleece, hand spun and woven with small bobbins so that the decoration and the cream ground are equally part of the structure - see on the wrong side of the shawl the loops showing how the threads turn round and go back and forward in each small area. This is a tapestry technique and the amazing acievement is that the cloth is so flexible.
Kashmir. Probably second quarter of the 19th century.
WSCAD Collection Muriel Rose bequest

smaller square table at north of first area:
This table shows the individual quality that emerges within the tightest of traditions, when fibre, looms and method of work is uniform, unchanging over generations

80. Three dark brown cloths with decorative edges
Mantas - the cloth worn as an outer garment by women over their shoulders and back and caught together in front by pins, in the villages of the High Andes.
All llama wool. All very hard twisted handspun thread, very closely woven, warp faced on back strap looms but each an individual entity.
Bolivia
Twentieth century | WSCAD.

79. Three cream shawls
All spindle spun form cashmere goat undercoat. Every thread in the two finest shawls is 2 ply ie. spun half the size you see. All the same ten thread herringbone weave but each an individual entity.
The finest is 11'11" x 5'5" made in one piece.
The next is 11'11" x 5'7" made in one piece.
The least fine is 5'6" x 5'6" made in one piece.
Kashmir
19th century

81. Three narrow width lengths
Ramie fibre cloth for kimono
Japan
Probably 20th century
WSCAD collection Muriel Rose bequest

82. Yellow cloth
Silk with decoration by binding the warp before weaving. Two widths sewn together. The green border is only on one side and designed to be seen.
Origin unknown WSCAD ??

83. Mat
Made using weft of straw with the decoration made by placing of the joints of the straw.
Probably Eastern Europe
20th century

SECOND MAIN AREA

All the previous exhibits have been 'limited' by local material, tools, skills and supported by strong community tradition. This century has seen all materials, tools and knowledge of techniques internationally available and production enormously speeded and devalued.
Some individual craftsmen have resisted this indigestion and the superficilaity that this has brought to explore within a chosen field, others explore extensions of the technique itself. Some work from raw materials, designing and spinning the their yarn and weaving and finishing their own cloth. Some are epicures in their selection of good yarn for their cloth, rugs or knits. Some have sought and found good sloth on which to dye or print. From what they have discovered, throuhg most deliberate and involved making, they contribute to the qualities of contemporary living.

84. Pale length
Horsehair. Traditional cloth for furnishing. Horsehair for weaving mostly comes from China but the white hair which are not bleached, come from 'classier' horses.
John Boyd and Co. Castle Cary, England.
1980s

85. Long grey and white hanging
Linen
Limited edition of microgauze
Peter Collingwood WSCAD.

86. Long narrow brightly coloured strip
Silk, hand woven, the black and white pattern created by binding the warp threads before dyeing
Mary Restiaux

87. Grey quilt
Silk, machine quilted. The basic silk is grey and white striped, the other colours come from the stitching thread. The ripple effect has been developed by simple machine stitching
Phyllis Ross
Crafts Council Collection

88. Light weight cloth
Cotton and silk, hand woven on draw loom
Amelia Uden
Crafts Council Collection

89. Hanging
Pleated and printed
Eng Tow
Crafts Council Collection

90. Two curtain lengths
Wool, hand woven
The weaver owned her own sheep, not native to Denmark, which she introduced to give the right fleece for the quality of cloth she wanted - crisp, not woolly. She spun her own thread on a small spinning mule - similar to that in the Textiles Department here. Her work is much bought by Danish architects.
Paula Trock, Denmark WSCAD.

91. Yellow and natural black rugs
The weaver has explored the Navaho method of four selvedge weaving. the subtle pattern in the main part of the rug is built up by using the limitations of the technique in which small bobbins or balls of yarn are used to weave back and forth in small areas. The Yarn is mostly hand spun and very carefully chosen to exploit this.
Stella Benjamin

92. As above

93. Heavy curtain
Hand woven on a draw loom using Nigerian hand spun cotton with an extra wool warp brocade. the cloth was designed to be joined at the selvedges which lie horizontally.
Elizabeth Peacock
Crafts Study Centre, Bath

94. Grey rug
Peter Collingwood
Crafts Council Collection

95. Five furnishing lengths
Block printed
Phyllis Barron and Dorothy Larcher
Crafts Study Centre, Bath

96. Door hanging- draught stopper
Wool, hand spun and hand woven. Two widths sewn together.
Elizabeth Peacock
Crafts Study Centre, Bath

97. Shawl
Wool, hand spun, the pattern made by warp and weft brocade
Elizabeth Peacock
Crafts Study Centre, Bath

98. Two dress lengths
Handwoven using a mixture of silk and wool, some of both hand spun
Ruth Okubo, Japan

99. Three knitted caps
Hand knitted
Alison Ellen

100. Two large stoles
Entirely hand spun enriched with weft inlay
Anne Lander

101. Rug
Mary Farmer
Crafts Council Collection

102. Loose jacket
Silk, hand woven and made up by the weaver
Geraldine St Aubyn Hubbard

103. Rug
Goat hair and wool hard spun by weaver. Hand woven using Navaho four selvedge technique
Margaret Bide

104. Stole
Silk and wool double cloth. Designed and woven on her power loom usinf wool yarn she had designed and produced commercially for Craftsman Mark.
Morfudd Roberts

105. Curtain
Nigerian handspun cotton. Like the Welsh skirts and 'Wings' furnishing No 93, the weft has been designed to hang vertically
Elizabeth Peacock
Crafts Study Centre Bath

106. Plain wool dress length
Designed and woven on her own power loom using Craftsman Mark's Merino yarn
Anna Cady

107. Door hanging
Wool
Linda Petty
WSCAD Collection

108. Grey striped length
Silk
Hand screen printed using some discharge
Sally Greaves-LOrd WSCAD.

109. White rug with red arrows
Navaho technique (see Nos 91 and 92)
Stella Benjamin

110. Seven lengths for clothes and furnishing
The machine is our modern production tool It cannot produce the personal quality that the craftsman can, but it can produce cloth as good as the industrial designer envisages and which the consumers make economically viable. Most of these lengths in natural fibres owe much to accumulated knowledge and sensibility Issy Miyake's cloth designer has used the new potentials of man-made fibres.

111. Garment
Designed by Issy Miyake

112. Hanging
Hand printed
Diana Harrison
Crafts Council Collection

113. Dress length - greens
Machine woven silk, the texture made by hand stitch resist before dyeing
Deryn O'Connor
WSCAD Collection

114. Yellow scarf
Silk, hanwoven
Sarah Cannon WSCAD.

115. Sleeveless jacket
Cloth woven with pattern created by binding the warp.
Mary Restiaux
The garment sewn by Lucy Goffin

116. Two knitted caps
Alison Ellen

117. Two square scarves and one small handkerchief
Silk cloth, waxed and hand painted with dyes
Monique Goetzee WSCAD.

118. Transparent curtain length
Cotton organdie, block printed
Phyllis Barron and Dorothy Larcher
Crafts Study Centre, Bath

119. Tablecloth
Handspun linen, hand woven
Rita and Percy Beales. Crafts Study Centre, Bath

120. Cream piece of silk
Machine woven
Anonymous

121. Length against window
Wool, hanwoven. Designed as a room divider to give different density All one yarn thickness built up by plying
Margaret Bide

122. Rug
Marta Maas Fjetterstrom Ab, Sweden

123. Rug
Woven in Polish commune using handspun wool
Many of these rugs came over after the second world war

Section of weaving by Elizabeth Peacock (see also Nos 93, 96, 97 and 105). Note that Elizabeth Peacock wove entirely in hand spun yarn, partly using the yarns that were imported at the time of the Imperial Exhibition in the 1930s and partly her own fine spinning of wool, linen and cotton.

124. Stole, brown
Nigerian cotton
One of two woven to commission from King Feisal of Saudi Arabia
Crafts Study Centre, Bath

125. Stole, red
Eri silk

126. Yellow stole
Silk

127. Three cottage tapestries
Narrow strips sewn together
Made when Elizabeth Peacock was over 80 years old
Crafts Study Centre, Bath

128. Piece of white wool cloth
Sample of a dress length using her own handspun south down wool
Crafts Study centre, Bath

129. Four scarves
Eri silk

130. Hanging
A trial piece building up a design from narrow stripa
Nigerian handspun cotton
Crafts Study Centre, Bath

131. Five lengths
All hand block printed except for the second from the left where the pattern is produced by waxing
Susan Bosence
Crafts Study Centre, Bath

OUTSIDE THE GALLERY IN THE MAIN ENTRANCE TO THE COLLEGE

132. Hanging on brick wall
Linen, hand woven and then screen printed
Emily Gaussen
WSCAD Collection

In low showcase:

133. Small decorative strips and oval
Coptic tapestries, linen warp, wool wefts which were originally part of garments
Probably 3rd or 4th century
Egypt WSCAD Collection

134. Fragments of wool and cotton cloth
From garments handwoven on backstrap looms
Ancient Peru - pre Spanish conquest
WSCAD Collection

135. Doll
Dressed in fabrics found in Ancient Peruvian graves

In tall showcases:

136. Silk scarves
Hand block printed
Phyllis Barron and Dorothy Larcher
Crafts Study Centre, Bath

137. Wool scarves
Hand block printed and stencilled on fine French Rodier woollen cloth
Phyllis Barron and Dorothy Larcher
Crafts Study Centre, Bath

138. Table linen
Linen hand spun and hand woven
Rita and Percy Beales
Crafts Study Centre, Bath

139. Scarves
Linen hand spun and hand woven
Rita and Percy Beales
Crafts Study Centre, Bath

Ella McLeod wishes to record her thanks to Ann Dolley, Deryn O'Connor and their helpers Julie Parry and Sheila Harvey for the magnificence and meticulousness of the exhibition design

POSTSCRIPT - Diary of a visit to Brittany

Ella McLeod wrote a diary during a visit to Brittany in 1938 to seek out traditional spinners and weavers.

She recorded a way of life that has disappeared since the second world war.

The West Surrey College of Art and Design hopes to publish the diary. We think it will be of interest not only to people with an interest in textiles but also to those who will enjoy a lively first hand account of Breton Individuals and customs.

Financing publication is difficult and we therefore suggest that people might subscribe before publication.

A typescript of the diary is available at the desk in the gallery together with a list for subscribers to sign.

INDIVIDUAL LENDERS TO TIMELESS TEXTILES EXHIBITION

Stella Benjamin
Margaret Bide
Susan Bosence
Anna Cady
Rowena Clayton
Peter Collingwood
Ann Dolley
Alison Ellen
Henry Hammond
Anne Lander
Ella McLeod
Paula Morel
Deryn O'Connor
Morfudd Roberts
Ewart Uncles
Kate Woolley

NAMES AND ADDRESSES OF CRAFTSMEN

Phyllis Barron (1890-1960) and Dorothy Larcher (1884-1952)
Work collected at the Crafts Study Centre, Holburne of Menstrie Museum, Bath

Rita Beales
Work collected at the Crafts Study Centre, Holburne of Menstrie Museum, Bath

Stella Benjamin
2 Bellair Terrace, St Ives, Cornwall

Margaret Bide
27 Broad Street, Alresford, Hampshire

Susan Bosence OBE
Oxenham Farm, Sigford, Newton Abbot, Devon

Anna Cady
49 Milton, Drumnadrochit, Inverness

Peter Collingwood
Old School, Nayland, Colchester

Alison Ellen
Jefferies Cottage, Bealeswood Lane, Dockenfield, Surrey

Mary Farmer
50 High Street, Boston, Lincs

Marta Maas-Fjetterstrom
Bastad, Sweden

Emily Gaussen
122 High Street, Boston Spa, West Yorkshire

Monique Goetzee
Bridge Green Farm, Gissing Road, Burston, Diss, Norfolk

Sally Greaves-Lord
19 Thornhill Square, London N 1

Anne Lander
Lordsmead House, Mere, Wilts

Deryn O'Connor
21 Trafalgar Court, Farnham, Surrey

Ruth Okubo
1-27-3 Nakadai, Itaboshi-Ku, Tokyo, Japan 174

Elizabeth Peacock (1880-1969)
Work collected at the Crafts Study Centre, Holburne of Menstrie Museum, Bath

Linda Petty
20 Providence Avenue, Leeds 6

Mary Restieaux

19 Rollscourt Avenue, London S E 24

Morfudd Roberts

Tone Dale Mill, Wellington, Somerset

Phyllis Ross

27 Ellington Street, London N 7

Geraldine St Aubyn-Hubbard

2 Charlton Court Cottages, Mouse Lane, Steyning, West Sussex

Eng Tow

210-D Sembawang Road, Singapore 2677

Paula Trock

Reproductions sold by den Permanente, Copenhagen, Denmark

Amelia Uden

Kingsbury Cottage, Upper Road, Little Cornard, Sudbury, Suffolk